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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 00727/1/89
30 June 1989

MEMORANDUM FOR: (see distribution)

FROM: [redacted]

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National Intelligence Officer for Near East
and South Asia

SUBJECT:

Executive Brief: Iraq, Syria, Israel: Prospects for
Confrontation in Lebanon.

1. Attached for your information is the above-captioned Executive Brief developed by the NIO/NESA from the special intelligence community meeting held on 28 June. If you have any comments, please contact me at

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Attachment
As stated

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Confrontation in Lebanon

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NIC#00727/89

30 June 1989

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

IRAQ, SYRIA, ISRAEL: PROSPECTS FOR CONFRONTATION IN LEBANON

- The acquisition of Iraqi FROG rockets by Lebanese Christian forces will increase the danger of an Syrian-Iraqi confrontation--which could also involve Israel--and the threat to US interests in the region.
- Iraq and Syria do not want to go to war. Baghdad might mass troops or launch limited attacks on Syria's eastern border if Syria invades the Christian enclave in Lebanon.
- Syria will react carefully to the presence of rockets in Lebanon, fearing an Israeli response and international condemnation. If the rockets are launched, however, Damascus will use force to try to eliminate them.
- Israel would welcome increased Syrian-Iraqi tension. Tel Aviv will selectively interdict Syrian air or naval forces involved in operations against the Christian enclave in Lebanon. Israel probably would use its air force to stall a massive Syrian ground on the Christians.
- Tel Aviv would not send its ground forces to fight Syria in Lebanon. Israel probably will not use a Syrian attack in Lebanon as an opportunity for Israel to destroy chemical warfare and missile facilities in Syria.
- The Soviets reportedly plan to tell the Iraqis that sending arms destabilizes Lebanon and that Moscow would reduce its supply of weapons to Iraq if Baghdad continues to send arms to Lebanon.

This memorandum is the result of a special Intelligence Community meeting held on 28 June 1989 to assess the situation around Lebanon. The memorandum reflects the general consensus of the attending organizations as interpreted by the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia.

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IRAQ, SYRIA, ISRAEL: PROSPECTS FOR CONFRONTATION IN LEBANON

Since its ceasefire with Iran, Iraq has supplied increasing amounts of military equipment to the Christian groups opposing Muslim and Syrian forces in Lebanon.

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reports that Iraq had sent FROG-7 rockets to Aqaba (Jordan) probably enroute to the forces of Lebanese Prime Minister Prime Minister Michel Awn.* We have no confirmation so far that FROG rockets are in Lebanon.

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Syrian President Assad has warned that he would not allow the Christians to have such weapons which could hit the Damascus area from the Christian enclave. Israel has said it would not interfere with the delivery of rockets to the Christians but has been vague about its response to Syrian military operations against the enclave.

Iraqi Goals

Iraqi President Saddam Husayn's immediate goal with the arms aid is to force Syria out of Lebanon. He probably hopes that a success in Lebanon will help him gain his ultimate goal of ousting Assad from Syria. The lack of Iraqi efforts to hide the FROG shipments suggest that Saddam is trying to goad Syria into a hasty response. If Saddam's current efforts fail to achieve results, we believe he will increase his activities in Lebanon--perhaps sending more arms--to tighten the pressure on Assad even more. The Soviets reportedly plan to tell Saddam that Moscow believes sending weapons destabilizes Lebanon. They warn that further Iraqi shipments of Soviet-made weapons could cause Moscow to reduce the flow of Soviet arms to Iraq.

Despite Saddam's provocative activities in Lebanon and his desire to humiliate Assad, we believe Iraq does not want a major military confrontation with Syria. For its part, Syria does not want war with Iraq. We believe we would detect a significant Iraqi or Syrian military build-up along their common border. So far we have not detected such activity. Baghdad probably would engage in public posturing and threats before launching any operations into Syria.

*Some analysts believe a few or all of the rockets may go to Awn's Christian warlord rival, Shamir Ja Ja. Ja Ja probably is much less likely to flaunt the rockets and would fire them only as a last resort.

the rockets may go to North Yemen.

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If Syria launches a massive ground attack against the Christian enclave, however, Baghdad might begin limited air attacks or ground skirmishes along the common border to divert Syrian attention. Iraqi forces might even take a small amount of Syrian territory and offer to exchange it for a Syrian withdrawal from Christian areas of Lebanon. Syrian defenses are weak along its western border with Iraq and its nearby oil fields are highly vulnerable.

Syria's Response

Syria's possible response to the presence of FROG rockets in Lebanon has become less predictable recently. Assad may deliberately be trying to obscure Syria's response to gain new options and time to maneuver diplomatically.

-- [] suggest that Damascus might try to intercept the rocket shipment at sea.

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-- Assad's earlier statements indicate Syria would try to eliminate the rockets as soon as their presence in Lebanon is confirmed.

-- [] suggests that Damascus might act only if the missiles are launched.

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Assad probably will act carefully in response to the mere presence of the rockets because he fears the response from Israel and other Arab states. We believe he probably feels he does not need to react to the arrival of the rockets immediately. If Assad tries to eliminate the rockets, Syria might use airstrikes, artillery, or commando raids in such operations. The Syrians probably believe that Awn and the Iraqis will judge the lack of any response as Syrian weakness which could lead to even more pressure on Damascus to act.

We believe Syria would not hesitate to respond with force against Awn and the Christian enclave if the rockets are launched--even if the target is not Damascus. The Syrians would try to destroy the rockets quickly with little collateral damage. They would be inclined to increase their use of force to the level necessary to neutralize the threat and avoid humiliation in Lebanon.

In addition to the risk of Israeli intervention, the Syrians also probably recognize the other costs and problems of using force in Lebanon. Syrian airstrikes might miss some of the rockets and launchers and a ground attack might become bogged down into a long and costly operation. In both cases Awn would have time to fire more rockets at Syrian targets and appeal for outside support. Assassinating Awn might temporarily disrupt the Christian forces, but they would still have the rockets.

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Israel's Response

Israel welcomes increased Iraqi/Syrian tensions which distract attention from the Palestinian issue. Tel Aviv does not want to become involved deeply in the Lebanese morass again. Israel probably would respond selectively to Syrian operations aimed at eliminating the FROGS. The Israelis would look for the opportunity to attack Syrian air or naval units involved in Lebanon to send a strong signal to Assad to back off and to humiliate him. If the Syrians launched a ground attack against the Christian enclave, Israeli aircraft might attack Syrian targets in Lebanon. We believe that Syrian ground operations against the Christians would stall under pressure from Israeli air attacks.

Israel would not send its own ground forces into Lebanon to fight Syria. A small possibility exists that Israel might eventually launch air attacks into Syria. Indeed some Israeli hardliners might see the Syrian attack on the Christian enclave as an opportunity for Israel to destroy chemical warfare and missile facilities in Syria. We believe, however, that such an Israeli attack is unlikely.

Awn's Moves

Christian Prime Minister and military leader Awn is highly unpredictable, making any judgment difficult on his use of the rockets. We believe he probably would publicly flaunt his acquisition of the rockets to embarrass Assad. Such activity would increase the pressure on Syria to react forcefully against Awn. He may also embark on a dangerous gamble; fire rockets at Syria in the hope of setting off a chain of events that will draw Iraq or Israel into a conflict with Syria and eventually force Syria out of Lebanon.

The Iraqis probably have some influence over Awn but not enough to stop him from launching the rockets. We have no evidence that Awn's forces know how to fire FROG rockets. Some of his soldiers could have been trained in Iraq or a small number of Iraqi rocket technicians could be sent to Lebanon. FROG rockets are relatively simple to operate and Christian forces may be able to teach themselves how to fire them. The accuracy and effectiveness of the system, however, would be reduced.

Implications for the United States.

We believe there is a significant chance that Iraq, Syria, Israel, or especially the Lebanese Christians will miscalculate the effects of their actions in the FROG rocket situation. The greatest danger to US interests is the possibility that clashes between Israel and Syria, and Iraq and Syria, might escalate to war. Israeli involvement also could side-track efforts to make

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progress in the peace process with the Palestinians. A confrontation in Lebanon would derail current mediation efforts of the Arab League. More conflict in Lebanon also probably would increase the danger to the US hostages held there and US embassy personnel.

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